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ToK Essay Outline

3. “The possession of knowledge carries an ethical responsibility.” Evaluate this claim.

Knowledge can be obtained and possessed by a person and by possessing the knowledge we have an ethical responsibility for it. This suggests to us that by merely knowing something we have an ethical responsibility for it. Though this claim in some aspects can be argued as true, it may be argued against that this is not always the case and that the possessing knowledge does not always carry an ethical responsibility. What is more is that surely ethical responsibility can only be established once the knower decides what to do with his knowledge and not simple because the knower possess it. This ambiguity within the statement leaves room for misinterpretation. With the possession of knowledge, we have the responsibility to decide whether knowledge ought to be shared or not and how the knowledge ought to be used. These decisions made involve ethics which are judgements of what we believe to be right or wrong according to our principles.

1. Discussion on **ethics** and **ethical responsibility**.
   1. What it is.
2. Against the statement: The possession of knowledge DOES NOT carries an ethical responsibility
   1. There are certain areas of knowledge where perhaps one does not carry any ethical responsibility for knowledge such as **Math**.
   2. Example: If a person familiar with simple mathematics knows that the square root of 25 is 5, there is little reason for the person to carry any sort of ethical responsibility for knowing that.
   3. Discuss: Knowing that the square root of 25 is 5 does not potentially bring or cause any good or bad to mankind whether he decides to share it or not.
   4. This is because this knowledge is already known by others.
3. For the statement: The possession of knowledge carries an ethical responsibility
   1. However, the possession of knowledge that has not yet been discovered does carry may be considered to carry ethical responsibility. This is assuming that ethical responsibility is established by simply possessing the knowledge and not having decided as yet what to do with it.
   2. This aspect pertains especially with **natural science** as an area of knowledge.
   3. Important discoveries have been made by doctors and scientists in their fields of study over many centuries. These discoveries have helped and improved the lives of humankind while some have done the opposite and have harmed humankind.
      1. Design of Nuclear weapons. Would the world have been better off without them? Should knowledge of weapon design have been hushed up?
      2. Cures for illnesses
      3. Knowledge about a person’s condition in healthcare- where knowledge is kept from family members by doctors or patient
   4. In these situations where the possession of knowledge may affect others, the knower must have ethical responsibility for it. The knower has an ethical responsibility to decide whether sharing the knowledge and using it a certain manner is right or wrong.
4. For the statement:
   1. **History** as an area of knowledge.
   2. Example: The knowledge we learn and obtain from the past and past events should help us make better ethical decisions in the future.
      1. Destructive nuclear bomb in Hiroshima with long-term negative effects.
   3. Sanctions against South Africa during Apartheid era. Knowledge gained from foreign countries’ own transgressions force them to act on that knowledge and attempt to prevent segregation from happening again. Believed to be the right thing to do.
   4. Discussion on **ethics** and how right and wrong are determined:
   5. Personal interest theory
   6. Circumstance- time, place, moral standpoint of society.
   7. **Reason**- We use reason to judge and weigh the consequences, motives and benefits of possessing certain bits knowledge and what we decide to do with it.
   8. **Emotion**- Influences our decision about what we decide to do with our knowledge. It may be used for good will but then again it may also influence one to use it for wrong doing.
   9. Elaborate and how this all affects our choices on what to do with knowledge we possess.
5. Conclusion